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Interim Leadership Positions: The Kobayashi Maru of Academia?

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Presenter Information

Alisha Ortiz, Julie A. Ray, Victor R. Wilburn, Melissa Odegard-Koester, and Jeremy Ball

- 1) Presentation Title: “Interim Leadership Positions: The Kobayashi Maru of Academia?”
- 2) Presenter Information

Jeremy Ball

Jeremy Ball is Chair of the Department of Criminal Justice, Social Work and Sociology at Southeast Missouri State University. He joined Southeast as Chair of Criminal Justice and Sociology in 2015, prior to the merging of departments. Before that he was faculty at Boise State University for 11 years, 3 of those spent as Chair. He holds a BA in Criminal Justice & Psychology from Indiana University, a JD from Indiana University School of Law – Indianapolis, and a PhD in Criminal Justice from University of Nebraska – Omaha.

Melissa Odegard-Koester

Melissa Odegard-Koester is Chairperson and Professor of the Department of Psychology and Counseling at Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. She served as interim chairperson of the Department of Psychology in the previous year. She is also a Licensed Professional Counselor in Missouri and has clinical expertise in a variety of mental health areas such as depression, anxiety, LGBT+ concerns, and social justice advocacy. She has authored and co-authored publications, presentations, and workshops in the fields of counseling, counselor education, and higher education. Dr. Odegard-Koester earned her Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Counseling at Idaho State University.

Alisha Youngblood Ortiz (Primary Presenter)

Alisha Youngblood Ortiz is Associate Dean of the Harrison College of Business & Computing at Southeast Missouri State University. She spent two years as Interim Chair of the Department of Accounting before the university underwent reorganization. She teaches business statistics and management science. Dr. Ortiz earned her BSIE, MSIE, and PhD in Industrial Engineering at the University of Arkansas.

Julie Ray

Julie Ray has been the Chair of the Dept. of Elementary, Early and Special Education at Southeast Missouri State University since 2011. She began this position as an Interim Chair and served in that role for 2 years. She has a PhD in Curriculum & Instruction: Early Childhood Education from the University of Missouri: Columbia. In addition to the chair position, she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in the early childhood program.

Victor Wilburn

Victor R. Wilburn is the Chairperson for the Department of Child and Family Studies (CFS) at Southeast Missouri State University. His responsibilities are to coordinate and oversee the Department which consists of 10 full-time faculty, eight part-time faculty, and over 175 undergraduate students. Dr. Wilburn’s activities consist of teaching in CFS and education, research, and student advising. Dr. Wilburn has also provided consultation and trainings to organizations committed to community development and

preschool education. His research focus is rural families/community development and suicidality and domestic violence among youth. His works have been published in journals and presented at conferences. He has been at the position of Interim Chair of Human Environmental Studies (January, 2017 to July 2018) and the position of Chairperson of Child and Family Studies (August 2018 to Present).

3) Disciplines: Educational Leadership, Higher Education

4) Presentation Theme: Working with Faculty and Administration

5) Presentation Type: Best Practice Presentation (45 minutes)

6) Abstract:

Leading a department through a transition such as reorganization or restructuring is difficult. When the unit leader is in an interim position, this is even more complicated. This presentation will be led by faculty who were all in interim leadership positions during major transitions in leadership, restructuring, and staff layoffs.

7) Keywords: Managing Change, Leadership, Transition, Academic Restructuring, Conflict

8) Presentation Document:

Interim administration appointments can occur for a variety of reasons: an unplanned departure, an 'off-cycle' decision to step down and resume a regular faculty position, a failed search, etc. When a vacancy occurs it can be a wonderful opportunity for someone to see if they would enjoy an administrative role. In some cases, the interim has no administrative career aspirations, but is simply willing to perform a valuable service in a time of need.

However, there are unique challenges that can come with an interim position. Because there is a fixed "end date," it can be difficult to initiate change within the unit. The usual level of resistance to change can be amplified by the fear of uncertainty. Interim chairs can also be in the awkward position of later applying for a position in which they have already been serving.

This session will be facilitated by a group of leaders who have all either served as an interim in recent years or led a department that was reorganized resulting in a change in leadership. We will discuss how to balance the need to be innovative with curricula and programs with an interim chair's personal desire to be conservative and not "rock the boat".

9) Recommended Citation:

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